

HENRY FORD ESTATE, FAIRLANE
(University of Michigan, Dearborn)
Fairlane Drive (4901 Evergreen Road)
Dearborn
Wayne
Michigan

HALS MI-3
MI-3

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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HENRY FORD ESTATE (FAIRLANE)

HALS NO. MI-3

Location: Fairlane Drive (4901 Evergreen Road), Dearborn, Wayne County, Michigan
Lat: 42.31401 Long: 83.23225

Significance: The Henry Ford Estate – Fairlane is significant because it is the last residence of Henry Ford, the pioneering automaker and owner of Ford Motor Company. The landscape is significant as it was designed by Jens Jensen, a prominent Landscape Architect in the Midwest and proponent of the Prairie School of Landscape Design.

Description: The estate is situated along the middle branch of the Rouge River at the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Evergreen Road in Dearborn, Michigan. The estate originally comprised 1,300 acres with a large portion of this under cultivation. After the deaths of Henry and Clara Ford, 210 acres including the residence and grounds was given as a gift by the Ford Motor Company to the University of Michigan for a Dearborn campus. The estate now comprises the west portion of the University of Michigan – Dearborn campus with the original Fair Lane Drive as the bisecting line. Several original managers' cottages are located on the east side of Fair Lane Drive and now house University offices and the Environmental Interpretive Center was constructed in 1987 on the west side of Fair Lane Drive in the northern portion of the campus. The residence was designed in what is described as a Scottish Baronial style of limestone with dark wood trim. Near the house and immediately adjacent to the Rouge River is the powerhouse which generated electricity for the estate by harnessing water power. To the southeast of the powerhouse is the large greenhouse and gardening building. Jensen designed formal gardens near the house including a perennial garden, a rose garden, a players green, and bowling green and the more extensive grounds included an interconnecting meadow system, lake, and trail gardens. The dam and the edge of the river near the dam are defined with the horizontal rockwork characterized by many of Jensen's designs. The areas between the meadows have matured into woodlands as a part of Jensen's original plan. A garden structure and artificial pond system with cascade and reflecting ponds are located in the southeast meadow as a remnant of a rose garden later designed by Herbert J Kellaway for Clara Ford, Henry Ford's wife. This entire area consisting of seventy-two (72) acres is now called the Environmental Interpretive Area and is used by the Environmental Studies Program of the University as an outdoor classroom and for nature programs for school children in Southeast Michigan.

History: The estate was built between 1914 and 1918 and originally consisted of 1,300 acres. From early photographs, it appears the landscape plans as prepared by Jens Jensen were fully implemented complete with formal gardens, naturalistic plantings, pond, and stonework. The original plans do show tee boxes and greens in the existing meadow system and on the west side of the Rouge River. The meadow system (originally comprising four (4) holes) was constructed without tee boxes and greens but the nine (9) holes on the west side of the river were not constructed. In the late 1920's, Clara Ford commissioned Herbert J. Kellaway and Harriet Foote to design a large rose garden in the southeast meadow. This garden comprised approximately two and a half (2-1/2) acres with extensive rose beds, artificial ripple waterfall and pond system, pergola, and garden structure. Also at this time, Ellen Biddle Shipman redesigned the formal rose garden and perennial garden on the south side of the house to add a tea house, stone walls, and central fountain. A portion of the Jensen prairie rock garden adjacent to the boathouse was also modified to follow a European alpine rock garden style. As stated earlier, the landscape of the estate now comprises approximately seventy-two (72) acres and includes the modified formal gardens near the residence, Burroughs' grotto, the boathouse and modified rock garden, the meadow system with rose garden ruins, the partially restored trail gardens, and original cascade and river stonework edge. (Some information in this section was taken from the brochure for the self-guided outdoor walks.)

Sources: Grese, Robert E. 1992. Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Conservation Planning Study of Jens Jensen's Landscapes at the Henry Ford Estate – Fair Lane Dearborn, Michigan. A study funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. September, 1984.

The Henry Ford Home becomes Fair Lane Conference Center on the Dearborn Campus, The University of Michigan. Brochure. Undated.

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Meadow 1 – The Path of the Setting Sun (Brian Devlin, September 12, 2008).



Prairie Style Boathouse (Brian Devlin, September 12, 2008).



Trail Gardens (Brian Devlin, September 12, 2008).



Burroughs' Grotto (Brian Devlin, September 12, 2008).